

MHR *Connections*

Published by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

Volume 11 Number 11

November 2011



Winnipeg We Day inspires youth

More than 16,000 students danced, applauded and responded to questions with thunderous enthusiasm, yet for almost two minutes during one of the presentations silence filled the MTS arena last week.

Among the motivational speakers and the rock bands a young child soldier from Africa took the stage and told his story by holding up cardboard placards, each with just a few words.

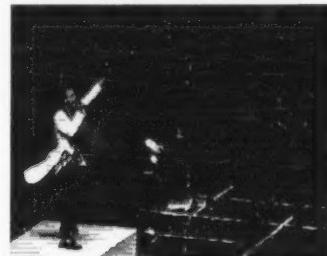
The words however told a powerful story. As the students sat riveted, Michel Chikwanine explained the torture he endured and how he finally had to kill his friend. The presentation was part of the "Vow of Silence" a *Free The Children's* annual fundraising and awareness-raising campaign.

Although the silence was profound, the speakers who called for the participants at We Day in Winnipeg, to work together and create change received enthusiastic responses, whether it was Mia Farrow shouting, "You are the generation I have been waiting for," or Rick Hansen telling students to "redefine what is possible."

We Day is an initiative of *Free the Children*, the organization founded by Craig and Mark Kielburger. Their message is clear and they refer to We Day as "the movement of our time." They also repeated that, "the biggest gift you can give a person is to never get charity again."

The line-up of guests and entertainment kept the students engaged from 10:00 in the morning until 2:00 that afternoon. Guest speakers included former United States Vice President Al Gore, The Lady Bug Foundation Founder Hanna Taylor, Spencer West who lost both of his legs from the hip down at the age of five and former Prime Minister Paul Martin.

The energy was kept up with the entertainment by such performers as Hedley, Shawn Desman, Down with Webster and Sierra Noble.



Shawn Desman gets everyone dancing.

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The Rights Connection

by Jerry Woods, Chairperson

Youth also inspire

I had the honour of attending We Day last week with some of the Commission's staff and family. There is little doubt that the students in the arena were greatly inspired by the motivational speakers. When asked if they were ready to take action, the deafening roar of "we are" said it all.

We have known the power of youth for a long time at the Commission. Over the years students at our youth conferences have produced banners, videos and public service announcements about their passion for human rights here in Manitoba and around the world.

Then there are the amazing past and present recipients of the Annual Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award. These awards are given out every year in celebration of International Human Rights Day, December 10. Amazing young people, like Anna Celestrya Carr, the students of Joe A. Ross School, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Krupa Kotchka, Tasha Carriere-Spillet, the Maples Collegiate Unity Group and the young people of Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network have been recognized for their dedication to human rights.

The work of these students has ranged from fighting against racism and violence against Aboriginal women and girls to raising funds to educate Rwandan children. This year's Sybil Shack Human Rights Award recipient is a young woman named Rebekah Enns who courageously is starting a gay-straight alliance group at her school.

I know the students are inspired by We Day and the power of such speakers as the Kielburger brothers, Al Gore, Rick Hansen and Spencer West.

As for me, I am inspired by the young people in this province every day.

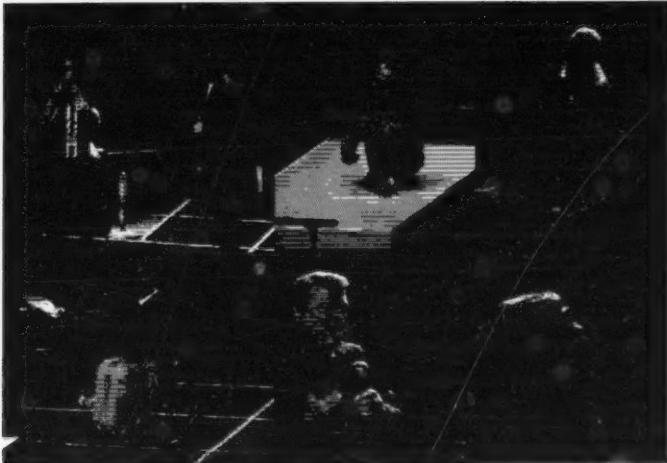
The 2011 Manitoba Human Rights Awards announced

See page 2 for details

Human Rights Awards Reception

December 8, 2011, 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Kum Koon Garden, 257 King Street, Winnipeg

Tickets are \$20.00 and available
by contacting the Manitoba Human Rights
Commission at 945-3007



Motivational speakers give students the confidence for action

(Top row: right to left: Craig and Mark Kielberger, Spencer West, Mia Farrow. Below: Rick Hansen, Al Gore and Hannah Taylor.)

Here are just a few of the questions and statements receiving wildly enthusiastic responses:

Mark Kielburger: "Look to your left and look to your right, and see someone who's about to change the world."

Craig Kielburger: "Who is ready to take action?"

Mia Farrow: "You guys are the architects of the future. I feel your power."

Al Gore: "This world needs the change you can bring. In Winnipeg 16,000 started the change."

Rick Hansen: "At the conclusion of a journey is the beginning of a dream. Mine is an accessible, inclusive world."

Rick Hansen: Someday a wheelchair will be something people will only see in a museum.

Spencer West: "We define impossible as possible. To non-believers, I give them 16,000 of you."

Human Rights settlement confirms the right to choose

A human rights mediated settlement, which began as a complaint by Community Living - Manitoba (CLM) against the Government of Manitoba, the Executive Director of the Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC) and The Public Trustee, has resulted in balancing the rights of people with disabilities.

The human rights complaint dealt with CLM's concerns regarding the slow progress being made in placing individuals living at the Development Centre into the community.

After a year of detailed human rights investigation, the Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners directed that the parties take part in mediation facilitated by the Human Rights Commission. The intense mediation and the final settlement reveal that diligence and hard work by everyone at the table can result in change.

"As each party brought its own perspective to the issue of institutionalization, the mediator took a measured and practical approach," says Jerry Woods, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners adding that, "alleged systemic discrimination complaints are complex and require more time but in the end, the efforts are always worth it."

The Government of Manitoba has agreed to move 49 people on the transition list from the MDC into the community over the next three years. This, and future placements, will be closely monitored by a committee including interested parties and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

Although the Government agreed that community living is a better option, the settlement also recognizes that everyone has the right to an informed choice, including those individuals and families, who at this point, prefer to live at the MDC. For the first time however, the agreement does give CLM the opportunity to present MDC residents and their families other community living options including the opportunity to visit and experience various community living settings.

Student from Mennonite Community and union receive human rights awards

The Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission proudly announce the recipients of the 2011 Human Rights Awards.

The Annual Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award recognizes a person or group of people under 25 years old who has promoted respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms within Manitoba. The recipient of the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth award for 2011 is Rebekah Enns of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg. Rebekah initiated a gay-straight alliance group at her school.

In her nomination papers Donna Peters-Small wrote that setting up this group "took a great deal of courage as the topic of homosexuality is a controversial one in our community and Rebekah knew she was opening herself up to possible criticism and judgement."

This year's Commitment Award recognizes those employers and unions who have demonstrated a commitment to human rights resulting in an inclusive and diverse workplace.

The recipient of the 2011 Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba is the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 832 Training Centre. The UFCW provides and promotes an inclusive union that reflects the diversity of its membership and their families. It was nominated by Carrie Walker Jones and Semhar Ekubamichael who say that the union's work includes the right to be free from discrimination, the rights to be free from harassment the right to be treated with respect and dignity and the right to opportunities that allow individuals to succeed.

Everyone is encouraged to attend the awards reception at an after-work reception on December 8, which will also celebrate International Human Rights Day, at Kum Koon Garden, 257 King Street, Winnipeg, between 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm.